

Week of September 9, 2002: MDOT Flash Facts

Topic: Traffic Signal Safety

Monday

Facts:

There are over 600 signalized intersections in Maine. There were 10,000 crashes at these intersections over the last three years resulting in 6 fatalities and nearly 5,000 injuries.

Tips:

Intersections can be hectic -- Motorists are turning, pedestrians are crossing, drivers are checking street signs, and deciding if they should go or stop. It is definitely not the place to make assumptions about what will happen.

Do not assume that:

- the light will stay green until you reach it.
- the driver ahead will proceed without stopping.
- those having the red light are going to stop.
- "right on red" is automatic. (There may be signs prohibiting it, traffic may be too heavy, pedestrians or bicycles may be crossing.)
- that the other vehicle is going to do what it seems to be indicating.

-Be alert at intersections, watching:

- the traffic signal
- traffic activity in all directions
- bicycles and pedestrians.

-Be ready to make quick, smooth, safe adjustments. (As you approach an intersection, keep your foot over the brake, so you can quickly react to changing situations and get into the correct lane as soon as possible.)

Wednesday

Facts:

-Intersection crashes have led to 6 fatalities and nearly 5,000 injuries during the last three years in Maine.

-There are nearly 200 pedestrian and bicycle crashes at signalized intersections.

Tips:

Here is what to do at signals:

- Green Light: Go (But make sure the way is safe and clear. Turn only if permitted-and check for pedestrians crossing before proceeding into the turn.)
- Steady Yellow Light: Stop if possible. (The yellow light is designed to clear the intersection before the red light.)
- Steady Red Light: STOP. Do not enter the cross-walk or intersection. (Right turn is permitted after STOPPING, unless posted otherwise, but you must first yield to pedestrians and other traffic.)
- Left Turn Signals: Proceed on green arrow, yield on green "ball" light and yellow arrow, stop on red arrow or red "ball" light.

Right Turn on Red:

- Not permitted at some intersections (watch for signs that prohibit Right on Red)
- Come to a full STOP first.
- Yield to all through traffic and pedestrians, especially pedestrians and bicycles on the right. (People tend to look left for approaching traffic and ignore the bike and pedestrian.)
- Proceed right only if normal flow of through traffic will not be interrupted.

Friday

Facts:

Driver errors noted in crashes at Maine signalized intersections during the last three years include:

- Over 1,200 drivers were reported as disregarding the traffic control device.
- About 3,300 drivers were reported as being distracted or inattentive.
- Nearly 2,100 drivers failed to yield the right of way.
- Over 1,100 drivers were following too closely.
- Nearly 400 were traveling at illegal or unsafe speed.

Tips:

Tips to avoid an intersection crash:

- Keep focused on the driving task. (watch for signals, signs, traffic, proper lane position, pedestrian and bicycle activity)
- Use lane position and turn signals to 'show' others where you're going.
- Yield the right of way.

Remember, potential conflicts with other vehicles exist when making a:

- right turn (with opposing left turners and straight through traffic);
 - permitted right on red (with those with the right of way, pedestrians and bicyclists);and
 - left turns (with oncoming vehicles going straight through the intersection).
- Keep your wheels straight, as a rear-end collision could send you into the opposing lane.

All of these situations require that you carefully check the other traffic movements, and yield when appropriate.

When looking for possible traffic conflicts, check all lanes. (A person waving you through may mean well but may not be aware of another oncoming vehicle.)

- Maintain a safe following distance.
- Slow down and be ready to stop.
- Don't delay – when it's your turn to legally and safely do so, proceed through the intersection at a safe speed without delaying those behind you.